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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of black students in private schools has been stimulated partly by concern about the adequacy of the public schools; a desire by parents for greater choice about, and control over, their children's schooling; and a desire to find schools with values similar to their own. Private school efforts to draw minority students have also contributed to this shift. Contrary to the commonly held view that only middle class black families choose private schools for their children, a 1980 census shows that 100,000 black students from families living in poverty attend private schools, which is only slightly less than the number of all blacks enrolled in private schools. Furthermore, a growing percentage of minority students pay full tuition. Several major studies of the 1980s indicate higher standardized achievement test scores of black students in private schools than those in public schools; however, a variety of other factors, particularly socioeconomic status, limit the comparability of data. The qualilty of education varies, although factors such as the level of teacher training, years of teaching experience, and the materials available appear to decrease as the number of black students increase. The level of desegregation appears to be decreasing in private schools: the number of black teachers has not increased with minority enrollments and many inner city private schools are becoming increasingly segregated (predominantly black). A four-page list of references concludes the document. (ETS)

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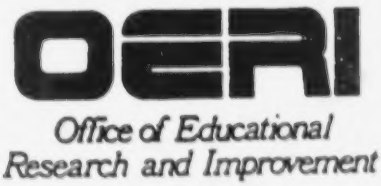

BLACK STUDENTS AND PRIVATE SCHOOLING

Growing black interest in private schooling has mirrored a slight national shift away from public education. While private schools appear to serve black students well in many areas, recent research both clarifies and raises questions about which black families are sending their children to private schools, what they want from them, and how their children are doing academically and socially in these schools.

Nationally, about 5 percent of all black families currently have children in private schools (U.S. 1980 Census). This is less than half the proportion of white families (11 percent) who send their children to private schools. Although private schools are growing in the suburbs, they are still most common in the inner cities. There, about 7 percent of all black students attend private schools, while white private school enrollment is as high as 20 percent in urban areas.

For black families, the growing interest in private schools has been stimulated in part by concern about the adequacy of the public schools, a desire for greater choice about, and control over, their children's schooling, and a wish for school values to be more congruent with their own beliefs and aspirations. But their interest has also been stimulated by increased private school desire to draw

minority students.

In particular, inner-city Catholic schools, which, until recently, were easily filled with Catholic students of Irish, Southern- and Eastern-European origin, have been active in recruiting minorities, and their relatively low tuition makes them an attractive alternative. Over 150,000 black students attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools in 1983-1984 (Report on Education of the Disadvantaged, 1985).

Nationally, black students represent around 18 percent of the total Catholic elementary school enrollment. However, a study done in the Chicago area illustrates the even greater role blacks play in Catholic schools in many inner cities, as well as the dramatic increase in black students in a single decade: black enrollment in Chicago Catholic elementary schools increased from 17 percent of the total Catholic elementary school population in 1970 to 27.9 percent in 1981 (Slaughter & Schneider, 1985).

There are also a growing number (currently over 250) of "independent neighborhood schools" throughout the country (Ratteray, 1983). These schools, established and run by minorities, are generally financed by tuition and modest community fundraising, and serve black, Hispanic, or Asian children. The schools often have a religiious or cultural focus, such as Fundamental Baptism or Pan Africanism, which gives the curriculum cohesion and ofers a like-minded community of parents, teachers and students.

Finally, there is an increasing black presence in a great variety of other types of private schools, from Christian schools, to elite

college-preparatory private schools, to alternate schools, and even to Jewish day schools.

Which black families are sending their children to private schools?

Contrary to the commonly held view that only middle class black families choose private schooling for their children, a number of black private school families are, in fact, working class or even poor. The 1980 census shows that approximately 100,000 black students from families living in proverty attend private schools (over 58,000 are in church-related private schools, and over 33,000 in other independent schools). These poor children constitute about 4 percent of all black school children from families living in poverty -- only one percentage point less than the proportion of all blacks enrolled in private schools (1980 U.S. Census).

Although Catholic schools do not serve all the low income black students attending private schools, they do serve a significant number. A major study by the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA, 1985) suggests some of the economic and racial characteristics of Catholic school students. In its sample of 910 Catholic high schools nationwide, 26 percent of the students had annual family incomes under $20,000, and 4 percent had incomes of less than $10,000. Within a smaller sample of 100 Catholic high schools, chosen for having at least 10 percent of their student body below the poverty line, the NCEA found 38 percent of the students to be black and 18

percent Hispanic, while 22 percent were from families with incomes under $10,000 annually (this was as high as 31 percent in the inner city). Among all Catholic schools serving low income students, 28 percent of all the poor students were from single-parent families and 39 percent of all black student attending these low income serving schools were from single-parent families.

A similar analysis by the Catholic League focused on 54 randomly selected inner city private schools, most of which were Catholic and all of which were Title I recipients. In these schools, 56 percent of the enrollment was black, and 31 percent Hispanic. Fifteen percent of all families had annual incomes of less than $5,000, or significantly below the poverty line. Another 35 percent of the families had the very low incomes of betweeen $5,000 and $10,000 and only 28 percent of the families reported incomes of $15,000 or over. Equally impressive given the sacrifices of private schooling, 35 percent of these families of inner city private school students were single-parent households (Cibulka, O'Brien, & Zewe, 1982).

Clearly, therefore, Catholic schools, especially in the inner city, are not havens for a black elite. Yet the black children they draw have better educated black parents than black students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds attending public schools. In the Catholic League's inner city sample, 33 percent of the black parents had at least some college education, compared to about 23 percent of all black 25- to 34-year-olds. Comparatively fewer private school parents had dropped out of school or had less than eight years of schooling (Cibulka et al., 1982).

What financial assistance do black private school parents receive?

Although there are no data on blacks and financial aid, we know that the percentage of minority students paying full tuition has increased significantly over the past decade. (It is not clear whether this is because their need for such aid has declined or because the available aid has simply decreased.) Minority students, however, still receive at least a third less financial aid than they need, according to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, 1984). There is also evidence that minority students in private schools receive financial aid at a slightly higher rate than do whites. In a 1983 nationwide sample of independent schools conducted by the NAIS, 15 percent of all students received some form of financial aid, and minorities, who comprised 9.2 percent of the sample, constituted 20 percent of those who received aid (NAIS, 1984).

However, a detailed ethnographic study of four Chicago private schools (both secular and religious) indicates that, in some instances, black students may not be getting the proportionately greater aid suggested by the national sample (Slaughter & Schneider, 1986). Black students in these four private schools were no more likely to receive scholarships than the other children, even though their average family income was significantly below that of the nonblack families. No school in the study had funds designated for black scholarships.

The NCEA reports that Catholic high school costs are low enough that significant numbers of students pay for most or all of their

tuition from after school jobs (NCEA, 1985). However, informal comment from researchers working in a variety of private schools suggests that for many black families the sacrifice of sending a child to private school is enormous, and that siblings as well as extended family members all contribute (Slaughter & Schneider, 1986; Johnson, 1986).

Why do black families choose private schools?

Most black parents choose private schools because they want their children to receive the best possible education. Private schools, both religious and secular, are thought to stress the basic skills, to have higher standards of discipline, and to offer better academic preparation for good jobs and advanced schooling, as well as to provide the networks and social skills for upward mobility in a predominantly white society. Speaking of why black families choose private schools, Slaughter and Schneider (1986) write: "Their choice of private schooling appears to be less of a rejection of public schooling, and more of an evolution of a new strategy for insuring future levels of sustained and/or upward mobility for the family" (1986, p. 572). Those black parents who choose a black independent school for their children may also seek racial identity and a strengthening of the black community.

Despite the heavy reliance of black families on the Catholic schools as their choice for private schooling, more than half of all

families of black Catholic school students are, in fact, not Catholic (Cibulka et al., 1982; NCEA, 1985). For those for whom religious affiliation is not the major draw, Catholic schooling must offer other incentives. These families may choose Catholic schools because they are in their neighborhoods, their teaching is thought to be better than in the public schools, and their costs are known to be significantly below those of most other private schools. For some, the presence of values and tradition, even when these are not the same as those of the family, are important.

The belief of parents that school authorities will respond to their needs is an important rationale for their choosing an inner city Catholic school, according to the Catholic League. Freed from the legal and bureaucratic impediments of the public sector, and dependent upon parent-paid tuition, inner city Catholic schools can, and must, respond to their neighborhood and student population. "These schools have a reputation for answering parental wishes when they are expressed, and for providing an open climate where decisions can be shared" (Cibulka et al., 1982, p. 79). A more cautious view is that, given the lack of meaningful choice in most public schools, the very fact of selecting a private school may be an important source of parental satisfaction (Raywid, 1985).

Notwithstanding variations, black parents have instinctive educational criteria for selecting and appraising private schools that can be differentiated from those of white parents (Slaughter & Schneider, 1985, 1986). Whereas white parents often have "humanistic" or traditional" educational philosophies, black parents are more often

"deliberate" or "authoritative" in their educational philosophies. While both black and white parents are likely to indicate the value of a desegregated education, more black than nonblack parents link educational quality with desegregation.

Educational aims are quite diverse even among those black parents who choose all-black private schools (Johnson, 1986). Whereas some seek a particular cultural or religious orientation, others choose a school because the classes are small or the teaching is known to be excellent. For some black single mothers, choosing an all-black school may also be an attempt to offer their children black male role models.

What is the effect of private schooling on black students' achievement?

Several major studies of the 1980s show that the standardized achievement test scores of black students in private schools are higher than those in public schools (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1980; Greely, 1982; Cibulka et al., 1982). There is even evidence that, at least in the lower grades, behind-grade-level transfer students from public schools quickly make impressive gains and end up their first year in private school at grade level (Cibulka et al., 1982). However, a number of authors have suggested that these findings are exaggerated, since black private school and public school students are not exactly comparable in socioeconomic status or educational

background. In addition, merely choosing a private school suggests a difference in educational motivation; thus, public and private school students can never be comparable (Alexander, 1985; Alexander & Pallas, 1985; Controversies, 1982; Evidence, 1982). The Catholic School League notes that the power of its own findings is somewhat lessened because the educational background of private school families is slightly better than that of public school families, and the generally acccepted linkage between parental educational level and student achievement is therefore operative (Cibulka et al., 1982).

The benefits of private schooling are also less clear when comparisons are made within tracks. Under these conditions, the differences between public and private school scores shrink (Alexander, 1985). However, poor black private school students are less likely to be assigned to a vocational track than are poor black public school students, and so poor black private school students have a greater chance than poor public school students at those subjects necessary for high achievement on standardized tests.

From their analysis of black student achievement in four Chicago private schools, Slaughter and Schneider (1986) report that, although black students in all but the Catholic (largely low income) school had higher-than-grade-level reading comprehension scores, black students' reading scores in all four schools were correlated completely with their family income level. Moreover, this correlation between achievement and income level did not hold for the white students. That is, while the private schools were able to erase the effects of social class for white students, they did not do so for black

students. The authors note that, "Socioeconomic class is routinely implicated in some evaluation of (black) academic achievement in the primary and elementary school years, even when minimal performance standards are clearly met" (p. 571).

While private school attendance may raise achievement, it may not be the only means of doing so. Crain (1985, p. 2) points out that black students score higher on achievement tests as a result of desegregation, that is, attending largely white schools, and that "Blacks in predominantly white Catholic schools may not be scoring higher than they would if they were in desegregated [public] schools." Educational interventions such as peer and cross-age remedial tutoring, new science and math curricula, and certain instructional variables, have also been shown to yield positive effects greater by a factor of ten more than the effects of Catholic schools (Willms, 1985).

Do private schools offer black students a more enriched curriculum and better educational facilities than public schools?

Little detailed information on this question exists for the private schools in general, though the common view is that academic course offerings, particularly in the elite private schools, are often richer, and that the private schools have excellent facilities such as libraries, sports equipment, etc. Coleman et al. (1980) found, however, that Catholic schools tended to offer fewer electives, as

well as advanced academic course offerings, then did either other private or public schools. Using a more restricted sample -- Catholic high schools serving at least 10 percent poor students -- the National Catholic Education Association found the academic curriculum to be satisfactory or better. The majority of all students -- black, white and Hispanic, very poor, moderately poor, and non-poor -- were in an academic or college preparatory track. Nor was there any evidence of tracking black or poor students into vocational courses. Though Percentages did not vary much by race, in the very poor group black students were more likely than white students to pursue an academic Program (69 percent black versus 56 percent white). In the nonpoor group, the reverse was true (71 percent black versus 81 percent white Pursuing an academic program) (NCEA, 1986).

The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) recommended that all students graduate with 4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 3 years of social studies, and 3 years of a foreign language. Except in social studies, a majority of the students in the low income serving Catholic schools met these recommendations (NCEA, 1986). Analyzing Catholic school students by race and socio-economic group created a mroe mixed picture of the educational advantages low income students receive. While black students were more likely than Hispanic or white students to meet the national guidelines in science, they were less likely to do so in social studies and English. Very poor (black and white) students were less likely than moderately poor and nonpoor students to meet all standards except those for social studies. In addition to

taking the academic subjects recommended by the National Commission on Excellence, nearly all Catholic school students in the study (87 percent) took at least 3 years of religion, with black students (probably because of the large number of non-Catholics) taking less than others.

As for coursework at the extremes -- that is, for either accelerated or noncollege bound students -- Catholic schools serving low income students tended less often than other Catholic high schools to offer calculus, first and second year French, and first and second year German. At the same time, they more frequently offered accounting and remedial English.

Reviewing the quality and kinds of facilities offered by these low income serving Catholic schools also yields a mixed picture. Not unlike what occurs in the public schools, most Catholic high schools serving low income students are older than other Catholic schools; when they are in the cities, they are also larger. Most have smaller (or no) endowments for maintenance and little money for rebuilding. When compared to other Catholic schools with a smaller percentage of poor students, these low income serving schools have fewer athletic fields, running tracks, tennis courts, bookstores, photography labs and physics labs. At the same time, they appear to have more of the kinds of facilities that are associated with noncollege bound and vocational programs: remedial reading and math labs, wood shops, cooking labs, office equipment labs, and typing labs.

There is also evidence that the higher the percentage of black students in a Catholic school, the more likely is the class and pupil-

teacher ratio to be large. Factors such as the level of teacher training, the number of years teachers have taught, and the materials available, also appear to decrease as the number of black students increase (Cibulka et al., 1982; Richards & Encarnation, 1985).

Do private schools offer a better chance at a desegregated education?

One of Greeley's (1982) strongest findings was that black students in private schools had a far greater chance of learning in a desegregated (largely white) environment than they did in public schools. However, inner city private schools themselves are becoming increasingly segregated (predominantly black). A survey of 99 private elementary schools in Chicago showed that, while in 1970, 72 schools in the sample were less than 20 percent black, by 1981 only 54 schools were less than 20 percent black. More to the point, while only 17 percent were over 80 percent black in 1970, by 1981, 35 percent were over 80 percent black -- or segregated by almost any standard (Slaughter & Schneider, 1985).

There is also evidence that even when blacks are in predominantly white private schools true integration does not occur. Although black students may be chosen as often as white students to "be with," "study with," or "be influenced by," they are chosen for these roles by other black students, not whites (Slaughter & Schneider, 1986).

Unlike the public schools, where over the past decade the number of black teachers in schools with black student populations has

increased significantly, changes in hiring practices by Catholic and other private schools have not followed the increase in their minority enrollments. A recent National Association for Independent Schools survey showed minority teachers to constitute 2.8 percent of all teachers at the reporting independent schools (with black teachers comprising a little less than half of all minority teachers). Moreover, 46.7 percent of the schools reported no minority teachers (NAIS, 1984). Although the overall level of employment of black teachers in Catholic schools is quite low, black student enrollments in Catholic schools do lead to small increases in the number of black teachers. Black teachers are also more likely to by hired in the larger than in the smaller private schools (Richards & Encarnation, 1985).

Do private schools contribute to or diminish black students' racial identity?

Using their sample of four Chicago private schools, Slaughter and Schneider (1986) concluded that, except in the case of the Catholic school, an attitude of "color-blindness" prevailed. This meant that, although there were few overt acts of discrimination, there was also no attempt to provide knowledge and understanding of the heritages of students. Inadvertently, therefore, the curriculum may have given some black children the impression that blacks were not appropriate persons to hold important leadership roles or to contribute to the

culture through art, science, and so on. Moreover, in these schools, "there was virtually no attention to the social responsibilities of these as members of middle income black families" (p. 500). In the Catholic school, by contrast, cultural identity was often stressed -- even over a religious identity. "Black and nonblack students at St. August learn something in school that none of the students in the other schools learn, that is racial pride and cultural awareness" (p. 589).

Conclusion

As black students move into private schools at greater rates, a number of questions are raised. To what extent and under what conditions is a private school education better than a public school education for black students? What are the social and educational benefits and costs of being educated in a largely white environment? And, what will be the benefits and costs as private schools themselves become increasingly black? Are the economic sacrifices made by black families to send their children to private school worth it to the child -- to the black community?

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